DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 259 443 EA 017 811

TITLE	Educating Nevada's Youth: A Plan for Improving Our Schools. A Report to Nevadans.
INSTITUTION	Nevada Governor's Commission on Educational Excellence, Carson City.
PUB DATE	Nov 84
NOTE	24p.
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Curriculum; *Educational Change; *Educational Quality; Elementary Secondary Education; Graduation Requirements; School Community Relationship; State Action; *State Standards; Student Evaluation; Teacher Certification; Teacher Education; Teachers; Time Factors (Learning)
IDENTIFIERS	Excellence in Education; *Nevada

ABSTRACT

National statistics reported in recent studies of educational quality and information gathered by the Nevada Governor's Commission on Educational Excellence both show disturbing trends in educational performance, despite some positive indications. Among recent signs of improvement in Nevada are the recognition of some Nevada schools as outstanding by the United States Department of Education, the strengthening of requirements and curricular offerings by local school boards, revisions in standards for basic skills proficiency, rising scores on Stanford Achievement Tests among some student groups, and increasing standards for teachers' professional competence. The recommendations made by the Governor's Commission extend these improvements by calling for an increase in graduation requirements; a stronger and more carefully monitored curriculum, particularly in vocational and technological areas; and the establishment of an evaluation system that would allow Nevada's schools to be compared with each other and with those of other states, would provide recognition for successful programs, and would foster diagnostic efforts. The commission also recommends expanding the amount of time allocated to education; improving teacher preparation, certification, recertification, work assignment practices, and compensation; and increasing the involvement of parents, community members, and Nevada's special populations in the educational effort. (PGD)

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EA 017 811

EDUCATING NEVADA'S YOUTH

A PLAN FOR IMPROVING OUR SCHOOLS

A Report to Nevadans
from the
Governor's Commission on Educational Excellence

GOVERNOR RICHARD H. BRYAN, CHAIRMAN

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June Whitley, *Member, University of Nevada Board of Regents; Assistant Manager of Training Department, CENTEL, Las Vegas*

November 1984

Fellow Nevadans:

As Nevadans, we enjoy as our heritage the traditional values of strong families, sound economic practices, and an undaunted optimism in our abilities to prosper. These values are bound together by the belief that our future and our continued well-being ultimately rest with our children. Without adequately preparing our children to meet the growing challenges of citizenship, we will be unable to perpetuate the advances we have made and to further prosper in future years.

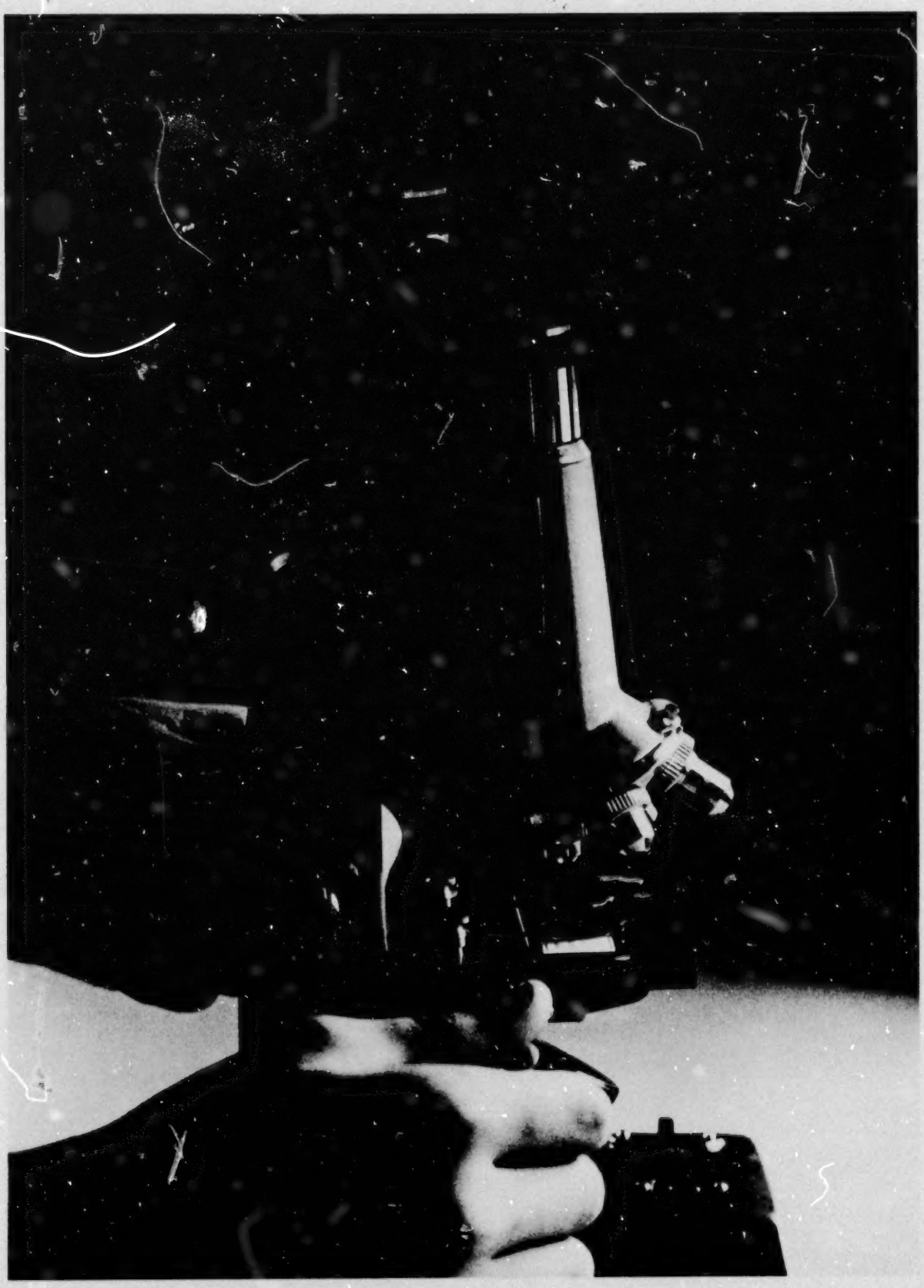
It is with this concern in mind that I formed the Governor's Commission on Educational Excellence. Seventeen other citizens concerned about the future of our youth and our State joined me in examining our educational system. The purpose of this, the Commission's final report, is to provide a blueprint for educational progress and a forum for public dialogue on how we can best ensure that Nevada's public schools provide our children with the sound educational foundation necessary to prepare them for the challenges of the future. It is my hope that our system of public education encourages each Nevada child to develop to his fullest potential.

I'm proud of the Commission's report as well as the contributions of the countless Nevadans who participated in its development. The recommendations contained in this report demonstrate our continued commitment to our children and our State's future prosperity.

I commend it to you—the people of this great State. Together we can achieve educational excellence.

Sincerely,

RICHARD H. BRYAN
Governor



INTRODUCTION

The most important undertaking in the American endeavor is that of education. If we are to survive as a free people and prosper as individuals, it is essential that the system of free public schools which we have established be characterized by excellence. Governor James B. Hunt, Jr., of North Carolina, while serving as Chairman of the National Task Force on Education for Economic Growth, has said it well: "Nothing matters more—nothing. Education is the public enterprise in our country that is closest to people's hearts—and most important to their lives. And education is the enterprise that is crucial to the success of everything we attempt as a nation."

Sharing these sentiments and philosophy on the importance of education to the American way of life, Governor Richard Bryan formed, in September 1983, a Commission on Educational Excellence to assess the quality of the State's elementary and secondary educational system and to formulate specific recommendations for the improvement of Nevada's system of public schools.

The Commission, which was chaired by the Governor, was drawn from all facets of statewide political, economic and educational interests. Legislators; members of the University Board of Regents, the State Board of Education, and a local school board; school and university administrators and teachers; representatives of teacher organizations; individuals sensitive to the needs of Nevada's minority and ethnic populations; and Nevada businessmen accepted the Governor's call to serve on the Commission. As evidence of their own personal commitment to the improvement of this State's schools, members of the Commission served without compensation for their time or reimbursement for their travel.

While the Commission was formed at a time when the nation's system of education was receiving unprecedented public scrutiny through such commissions as the National Task Force on Education for Economic Growth and the National Commission on Excellence in Education, critical review and objective analysis of the State's education system is not new to Nevadans. In 1978, the Legislative Commission of the Legislative Counsel Bureau, under a study committee chaired by then-Senator Richard H. Bryan, extensively reported on pupil achievement within Nevada. That committee's recommendations included the development of statewide curriculum standards; the development, monitoring and enforcement of quality and standards of excellence in the basics—reading, writing, mathematics, social studies and science; the development of a diploma program to recognize outstanding achievement in both academic and vocational students; the strengthening of disciplinary codes; the strengthening of high school graduation requirements; and joint school district and business community expansion of education programs to meet the needs of Nevada businesses.

In creating the Commission on Educational Excellence, Governor Bryan indicated that his goal for the panel was two-fold: First, to ensure that Nevada's system of public schools provide each Nevada child with the sound, basic educational foundation that will be necessary to meet the technological and social challenges of the future and, second, to guarantee that Nevada's public schools offer programs that encourage maximum personal enrichment and educate each child to his or her ultimate potential.

From the date of its formation in September 1983, to the date of the issuance of this report, the Commission on Educational Excellence held a series of public meetings to discuss and debate a wide variety of educational issues and to forge this dialogue into a plan of action for excellence in Nevada's elementary and secondary schools. In going about its work, the Commission relied on numerous sources of information:

- Reports and papers prepared by various national education study committees and groups interested in educational improvement throughout the nation. These reports are exemplified by *Action for Excellence: A Comprehensive Plan to Improve Our Nation's Schools*, issued by the National Task Force on Education for Economic Growth; *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, issued by the National Commission on Excellence in Education; and *Staffing the Nation's Schools: A National Emergency*, issued by the Council of Chief State School Officers' Ad Hoc Committee on Teacher Certification, Preparation and Accreditation.
- Reports and papers prepared by State educators on a variety of educational issues such as *Characteristics and Quality of Teacher Preparation Students and Programs* by the College of Education at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas and *Final Recommendations to the Governor's Commission on Educational Excellence* prepared by the Nevada State Advisory Council on Libraries.
- Testimony before the Commission by school administrators, teachers, representatives of professional and public groups, parents, business leaders, and public officials. These individuals testified at eight meetings of the full Commission that were held in Las Vegas, Reno, and Carson City.
- Letters from concerned citizens, teachers and administrators who volunteered extensive comments on the problems, possibilities and promises in Nevada education.
- Public contact with those interested in education throughout the State.

During the course of its activities, the Commission was impressed by the diversity of opinion it received regarding the condition of Nevada education and by the variety of suggestions to improve Nevada's schools. In many ways, the membership of the Commission itself reflected this diversity and difference of opinion during the course of its work. The report and recommendations that are presented herein represent a majority opinion developed during the Commission's deliberations. To those public minded citizens that took the time to share, frequently at their own expense, their concerns about Nevada's schools, the Commission extends its gratitude.

INDICATORS OF RISK

Today, there is unprecedented public dialogue on the quality of this nation's schools and on their ability to prepare young Americans for the future demands of society. To a large extent this dialogue is attributable to the findings of the National Commission on Excellence in Education reported in *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. Concisely and succinctly, the Commission found that "our nation is at risk" and that ". . . the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments." *A Nation at Risk* further indicates that, ". . . we have allowed this to happen to ourselves. We have even squandered the gains and student achievement made in the wake of the Sputnik challenge. Moreover, we have dismantled the central support systems which help make those gains possible. We have, in effect, been committing an act of unthinking, unilateral educational disarmament."

A Nation at Risk, in assessing the output of the American educational system, goes on to indicate that:

- Some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate by the simplest tests of everyday reading, writing and comprehension.
- About 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate. Functional illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40 percent.
- Average achievement of high school students on most standardized tests is now lower than 26 years ago when Sputnik was launched.
- Over half the population of gifted students do not match their tested abilities with comparable achievement in school.
- International comparisons of student achievement completed a decade ago reveal that on 19 academic tests, American students were never first or second, and in comparison with other industrialized nations, were last 7 times.
- The College Board Scholastic Aptitude Test demonstrates a virtually unbroken decline from 1963 to 1980. Between 1975 and 1980, remedial mathematics courses in public 4-year colleges increased by 72 percent and now constitute one-quarter of all mathematics courses taught in those institutions.

The Task Force on Education for Economic Growth reported that:

- Fifty-three percent of the nation's seventeen year-old students could not write a letter correcting a billing error and that between 1974 and 1979 the percentage of 17-year-olds that could adequately write a persuasive statement had dropped.
- Between 1960 and 1977, the proportion of public high school students enrolled in science and mathematics courses declined, with those enrolled in science courses dropping from 60 to 48 percent.
- There are widespread shortages of secondary school science and mathematics teachers with the average salary of a beginning mathematics teacher with a bachelor's degree being only 60 percent of the beginning salary offered by private industry to bachelor's degree candidates in mathematics and statistics.

During its meetings, the Governor's Commission on Educational Excellence was told that:

- More than 25 percent of all students entering Nevada high schools will leave for some reason prior to graduation.
- Two percent of Nevada's twelfth graders will not be able to pass the minimum proficiency (competency) exam at the twelfth grade level.
- Nevada has the seventh highest disposable personal income but ranks fiftieth in the percent of personal income it spends on primary and secondary education.
- Nevada's average salary for instructional staff in public schools in 1980–81, as reported by the National Education Association, was $21,590, or sixth of fifty-one (District of Columbia included) in the nation. In 1983–84, the average salary of instructional staff was $22,360, or twentieth of fifty-one.
- According to the National Education Association, Nevada's per capita expenditures of State and local government on a per state ranking basis are:

  43rd for public welfare
  16th for schools (including capital outlay)
  12th for highways
  6th for health and hospitals
  5th for police protection
  4th for fire protection

Both national and State statistics indicate that more and more young people emerge from high school without adequate preparation for either college or work. This situation becomes even more acute as the knowledge base continues its rapid expansion and the number of traditional jobs shrink. In Nevada the situation is particularly acute as the State embarks on an aggressive campaign to diversify its economy and broaden its economic base. Linked to this campaign will be the needs of new industry and enterprises for a trained and knowledgeable work force that can perform many of the tasks that are not currently being performed by Nevada's working men and women. The challenge for the future is clear: If Nevada is going to compete on either a global, national, or regional scale, it is imperative that the public education system provide each Nevada

school child with a sound basic foundation to meet the technological and social challenges of the future, encourage maximum personal enrichment, and challenge each student to fulfill their ultimate educational potential.

While the indicators of risk show alarming—some would say frightening—trends in national and local educational performance, there are also indicators that speak well for the Nevada School System.

THE INDICATORS OF IMPROVEMENT IN NEVADA'S SCHOOLS

In 1983, 3 out of the 8 schools nominated in Nevada, along with 142 other schools across the nation, were recognized as outstanding schools by the United States Department of Education. The schools which achieved this prestigious national designation are Kenny Guinn Junior High School in Las Vegas, Darrel Swope Middle School in Reno, and Elko High School. The selection of these schools was primarily due to strong administrative leadership, dedicated teachers, and concerned parental involvement. These 3 schools demonstrate that every school in Nevada has the potential for excellence.

Nevada's local school boards have increased graduation requirements and have strengthened curriculum offerings. During the 1984 school year, 7 of Nevada's school districts have increased graduation requirements through the addition of required courses in the areas of English, mathematics, social studies and science. Also, during the 1984 school year, members of the University of Nevada Board of Regents and the State Board of Education, meeting together as a Joint Council on College Preparation, identified the skills and competencies that Nevada's youth need for undertaking a 4-year college program and recommended that such college bound students complete at a minimum level, 4 years of English, 3 years of mathematics, 3 years of science, 4 years of social studies, 2 years of the same foreign language, 1 year of visual arts or performing arts, and computer education. Throughout Nevada, school districts have taken steps to strengthen their learning tools, such as curriculum guides, and, within severe budget limitations, upgrade instructional materials such as textbooks and computers, which serve to enrich the learning experience and academically demand more of the student.

Since 1979, Nevada has tested its students for proficiency in the basics. The proficiency testing program is carried out in the 3rd, 6th, 9th and 12th grades. Currently, the Nevada proficiency tests in elementary schools are being redesigned to raise the cut-off scores, with these increased requirements becoming effective in the fall of 1984. The Department of Education is also completing the task of expanding the scope and increasing the difficulty level of the high school proficiency examinations, with a new reading examination being ready by the fall of 1984 and a new mathematics examination being available by the spring of 1985.

National testing results on the Stanford Achievement Test indicate that Nevada students in grades 3 through 6 are *not* in a scoring decline. Nevada students taking the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) consistently score above students in other states. Results from students taking the test show that Nevada students rank above the national and western averages in mathematics and science and

Nevada students taking the American College Test (ACT) rank consistently with the national average. However, these national testing comparisons only indicate that Nevada students are faring either better than or as well as their national counterparts. While these results are encouraging, they also are comparisons to national norms that may not indicate high achievement and therefore not reflect the performance Nevadans desire for their youth.

Many school districts have developed mandatory attendance policies and most recently, some school districts have considered and adopted programs toughening the standards as a prerequisite to participation in extracurricular activities such as sports, student government, band and other non-academic pursuits.

Let it be said that there has been tremendous dedication on the part of Nevada's teachers and administrators towards maintaining and balancing the educational curriculum with the budget at hand to develop the skills needed to advance Nevada's students in the work world and the college world. Their desire is excellence. Furthermore, the efforts of the Governor's Commission on Educational Excellence has created additional momentum among the educational sector for strengthening education requirements. The Professional Standards Commission, a statutorily established commission charged with recommending standards for the teaching profession, has approved more stringent requirements for certification and recertification of teachers and has expedited their statutory duties. Also worthy of note are recent efforts by the Colleges of Education to screen out persons who desire to enter teacher training programs but are inadequately prepared. Additionally, legislative committees are meeting to make their separate recommendations on educational excellence and learning disabilities. Continuing the momentum and dialogue are the University of Nevada System Board of Regents, the State Board of Education, the Joint Council on College Preparation, Nevada State School Boards Association, the Nevada Association of School Administrators, Nevada State Education Association, the Parent Teacher Associations and many other interested groups.

THE NEED FOR EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION

There is an old saying that if you expect excellence, you get excellence. In schooling, excellence is defined both at the individual and the institutional level: At the individual level, excellence means that the student is performing on the boundaries of his or her individual abilities in ways that test and push back his or her personal educational limits. At the institutional level, excellence means a school system that establishes the highest possible goals

and expectations for all learners and provides every possible means to help learners achieve these goals. At the governmental level, adoption of these policies enables society to achieve excellence through the preparation and skills of its people to critically think, to accurately express themselves, and to successfully respond to the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

The Governor's Commission on Educational Excellence believes that a strong State commitment to excellence in our schools must not be made to the detriment of the State's legal commitment to provide equal access to an appropriate education for all of the State's youth, including the handicapped, minority, and non-English speaking student. Both excellence and equity in our schools have a profound and practical meaning for the State's economy and the State's society. Neither goal should be permitted to yield to the other. It is not enough that the State's schools encourage and train only college bound students. Since more than 80 percent of tomorrow's jobs will require less than a bachelor's degree, the State's schools must train and educate young people destined for careers as electronic technicians, secretaries, assembly workers, drivers, mechanics, farmers, miners, casino workers, construction workers, and a host of other occupations. These individuals also must excel in the basic skills of reading, writing and mathematics to effectively and efficiently function in an environment that is becoming increasingly complex and demanding. These individuals also need practical classes which train them for work and which impart the necessary skills and attitudes to render them employable.

In order to achieve the goal of excellence, Nevadans should expect their schools to have genuinely high standards, rather than minimum ones, and parents should require and encourage their children to make the most of their talents, abilities and time in school. The commitment to excellence must be fostered through strong community support for the local schools and, in turn, the local school system must be willing to provide the community with an honest and fair accounting of its investment.

While Nevada's schools perform well according to national standards, there is still much to be done. It can be done, for the State has the resources of the student, the teacher, concerned public officials, the business community and parents who are vitally interested in creating a system of common schools throughout the State that are characterized by excellence. The recommendations contained within this report are intended to foster the necessary community and parental support if the Commission's goal for excellence is to be achieved and maintained.

IMPROVING NEVADA'S SCHOOLS:

The Commission's Agenda for Achieving Excellence

1. INCREASING GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS

Increasing Requirements and Strengthening Curriculum

The basic foundation of a good education rests with a basic program of studies. More must be demanded of all students if Nevada is to receive a fair rate of return on its educational investment. The findings of basic educational research indicate that student performance increases if there are clear, consistent standards that demand the best of each student. Currently, minimum high school graduation requirements, where one credit equals one year of study, prescribed by the Nevada State Board of Education are as follows:

a. Three credits of English.

b. Two credits of social studies (the secondary course of study specifies one credit each in American government and American history).

c. Two credits of mathematics.

d. One credit of science.

e. Two and one-half credits of physical education/health.

f. Electives, nine and one-half credits; for a total of twenty credits per graduation.

After a thorough preview of these minimum requirements, the Governor's Commission recommends the following requirements for graduation:

a. Four credits of English (up from three under current requirements).

b. Three credits of social studies to include world history, U.S. history and government (up from two).

c. Three credits of mathematics (up from two), including consumer mathematics so that the student acquires the basic mathematical skills necessary to successfully function in daily life.

d. Two credits of science (up from one).

e. One-half credit of computer science (where there are now no graduation requirements).

f. Two and one-half credits of physical education/health.

g. At least five elective credits as required by the local board of education.

In proposing these graduation requirements, the Commission does not expect a uniform curriculum for every student. Rather, schools should have some flexibility in meeting the unique needs of their student population. For example, some students may need to learn a computer language as a part of their computer science coursework while others may need to learn to use the computer as a general tool.

In addition to this foundation, local school officials can elect to build other more elaborate programs of study by adopting either additional required courses in lieu of elective options or a greater number of courses for graduation. Graduation requirements for the Class of 1986, as reported by the Nevada State Board of Education in March 1984, indicate that of the State's 17 school districts, 8 require 4 units of English (students in Lander County may substitute 1 credit of foreign language for 1 credit of English); 11 require at least 3 units of social studies; 1 (Storey County) requires at least 3 units of mathematics; 7 require at least 2 units of science; and 4 require an additional one-half unit of physical education/health. Additionally, several districts restrict a student's selection of elective courses to subjects such as mathematics, science, social studies, or the language arts. These local districts' initiative in raising academic standards is commendable and clearly demonstrates that many local school boards are committed to achieving excellence.

The Commission strongly believes that these requirements are essential for every student graduating from Nevada high schools. Both the college bound as well as the vocational student must develop the basic skills in each of these areas so necessary to functioning in a society that grows more complex each day.

2. STRENGTHENING AND MONITORING SCHOOL CURRICULUM

The Commission further urges that the vocational education curriculum be developed in such a manner that it meets the work demands for the future. Testimony before the Commission indicated that in a number of areas, vocational course offerings are not geared to the current demands of the State's marketplace. Instead, course offerings appear to be developed around available equipment and teacher talents. The Commission urges local school districts to consult with the State's Job Training Office, the State's Employment Security Department, the State's Occupational Information Coordinating Committee, and the Vocational Branch of the State Department of Education as they develop vocational course offerings that are intended to lead to meaningful and productive employment. These offices regularly deal with job placement and job availability predictions and can provide the necessary data for local school districts to develop relevant vocational course offerings.

Also, the Commission recommends that additional funding be provided for the substantial needs of local school districts as they upgrade their course offerings in vocational education,

computer sciences and other offerings that are oriented to State and national technological advances. As technology and marketplace conditions change, so has the need for educational equipment to teach these new concepts and skills. Local school districts have not had adequate funding available to meet these changing demands and the Commission recommends that additional funding be provided to upgrade this equipment in order for Nevada to maintain quality and excellence in vocational and technological education.

A means for monitoring progress towards excellence lies in some evaluation of the student's knowledge and skills. Simply increasing course requirements has little effect unless the State and local school districts develop methods to determine that the knowledge that is intended to be learned is indeed being learned. Testing is an acceptable method of determining if courses are being properly taught and if students are attaining the indicated educational objectives. Believing in this method, the Commission strongly supported the Department of Education in its request for supplemental funding in order to upgrade the proficiency examinations. Upgrading the proficiency examination means that the State is making the minimum standards of proficiency more difficult to achieve, thus demanding that each student have higher skills and understanding of mathematics, reading and writing. Because the additional funding was made available during the interim between the 1983 and 1985 Legislatures, a more difficult high school reading proficiency examination will be ready by the fall of 1984 and a more difficult mathematics examination should be ready for implementation by the spring of 1985.

In addition to the proficiency examinations, the Commission also recommends that the State Department of Education develop, in concert with local school districts, criterion reference tests. Most existing instruments are norm referenced tests that are standardized instruments to measure a student's knowledge and skills in a specific area and compare them to a group of their national peers. Criterion reference testing is intended to assess a student's competency against a stated objective or criteria that is desired as an outcome. Development of this particular testing instrument would involve teachers teaching to a recommended and developed list of skills and knowledges, with the student being tested for that specific information. The criterion reference tests, which are used in a number of school districts including Clark and Washoe, measure a student's achievement and serve as a measure of whether the curriculum is properly being followed and taught. The results of these test scores should be included in the school ranking criteria discussed under the recommendation "Evaluating Nevada's Schools: A Report to Nevada's Taxpayers." Additional testing through SAT, ACT and Stanford testing instruments would continue to provide meaningful comparative data in determining how Nevada's students compare with those of other states.

Evaluating Nevada Schools: A Report to Nevada's Taxpayers

During its deliberations, the Commission felt that there should be an incentive program for building excellence in education. The purpose of developing a method of evaluating schools is two-fold: First, school evaluations are a means for the schools to provide accountability to the community or the taxpayer; in other words, a "report card" on the schools to indicate to parents and the community how each individual school compares to other schools in the State. Second, school evaluations would develop community involvement and participation in the local school system by encouraging educational competition and raising the standards of education. Nevada's system of elementary and secondary education is currently providing educational services to approximately 150,000 children, from kindergarten to 12th grade, and spends about $364.2 million including salaries, benefits, books and supplies, transportation and capital outlays annually to do the job. The purpose of a "report card" on schools is to establish a level of accountability to the public on how the various schools are performing and to encourage strong public and community involvement to increase the ratings of those schools that lag in the various indicators of performance. Nevada's schools represent the single largest investment of public funds. With requests for additional educational funding, it is not unreasonable that the public be fully informed on the results of their existing investment and the need for and promises of any additional investment of tax dollars. To implement a system of school evaluations, the Commission on Educational Excellence has requested that the Department of Education develop, if the data exists, a rating and ranking method involving the following 3 elements:

1. COMPARATIVE DATA WITHIN NEVADA SCHOOLS

a. Academic performance and ability scores on standardized tests and high school proficiency tests. These data should be reported across the years so that "progress" or "decline" is discernible to the reader. A score which predicts how well a school should be performing based upon what is known about the school should be reported so that comparisons can be made between actual and predicted performance.

b. Ethnic composition of the school student population.

c. Number of free and reduced priced lunches. These should be expressed as a percent of the total so that the reader is given some insight into the socio-economic condition of the school's population.

d. Student attendance rate.

e. Teacher and administrator attendance rate.

f. Student drop-out rate.

g. Student mobility which takes into account the transient nature of some of Nevada's population.

h. Average class size by grade and subject area.

i. Pupil-teacher ratio.

j. Number of teachers with masters degree or higher.

k. Number of years experience on the teaching staff.

l. Number of teachers assigned to teach outside their major or minor fields of preparation.

m. Number of students who come from homes where the primary language is other than English.

n. Parental participation in non-athletic school events.

The above list is not intended to be inclusive of all data elements that might be considered. The inclusion or exclusion of elements would be based on a decision as to which elements have a relationship to pupil achievement and the data would be reported in such a manner that the interested citizen would be able to draw an informed conclusion about the performance of the school in comparison to similar schools within the State of Nevada.

2. COMPARING NEVADA'S SCHOOLS TO THOSE OF OTHER STATES

This evaluation would compare how Nevada's schools and students measure against those in other western states on as many of the elements mentioned under Number 1, "Comparative Data Within Nevada Schools," as the Department of Eduction can gather data.

3. RECOGNITION OF OUTSTANDING SCHOOLS

The State Department of Education should establish a State program honoring and providing recognition for exemplary elementary and secondary schools. This will require the establishment of objective criteria for identifying outstanding schools in the State. The program should include elementary schools, junior high or middle schools, and high schools. This will allow the identification of excellent schools in the State and acknowledge their contribution to building a better system of public education. The Commission further agreed that all schools must know the criteria and understand the criteria so that they are able to fairly compete for recognition.

4. PROGRAMS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The recommedation for evaluating schools is intended to lead to the improvement of education in the State through the development of excellence within each individual learning center. Therefore, the Commission recommends that the State Department of Education initiate a diagnostic team approach for those schools that receive lower ratings or scores in the various criteria established. The diagnostic team, possibly consisting of a school administrator, a master teacher and a member of the Department of Education, would visit the school and, after careful study, offer its recommendations to the local school board as to where the school could implement programs for improvement. In evaluating the particular school, the team would pay careful attention to those items that the school administration and school faculty are capable of influencing through their leadership and the goals established for that particular school.

Maximizing Time Spent at School and School Attendance Policies

NRS 388.090 provides that local school boards provide a minimum of 180 days of free school in the districts under their charge. During the course of the Commission's work it was learned that a number of districts include days for Teacher's Institutes, registration and extracurricular events within the 180 days of school required by the above cited State statute. Before expansion of either the school year or the school day is considered, the Commission believes that "180 days of free school" should mean 180 days of teaching time. This would meet the public's expectation that it is receiving an actual 180 days of instructional time for its investment of tax dollars.

The Commission also believes that before expansion of the school year or school day is considered, attention should be given to the "teacher's right to teach and the student's right to learn" through the elimination of classroom interruptions. Testimony before the Commission indicated that extracurricular activities, discipline problems, absences, time for registration, and a variety of other intrusions, such as taking class photographs, into the

classroom setting constitute interruptions to valuable instructional time and should be strictly controlled if not eliminated by school district personnel. Therefore, the Commission urges all local school boards to adopt and rigidly enforce policies that severely limit the number of outside intrusions into the classroom environment.

Another aspect of maximizing time in school deals with attendance policies. A child who is not in the classroom cannot be taught, therefore, the Commission urges local school boards to adopt attendance policies which encourage student attendance, rather than discourage student attendance, and which find ways to keep the child in school rather than rewarding the absentee child by removing him from school. Local school boards are encouraged to adopt and implement policies which provide alternatives to classroom removal and deal with absenteeism and discipline problems in a manner which continues to allow the school child to receive instruction.

The Profession of Teaching

Excellence in education cannot be attained without excellence in teaching. Common sense suggests that the essential ingredient of a good school is a competent teaching staff that is dedicated and cares about students. Closely related to this is a similar need for competent administrators.

Today there is an acknowledged crisis in education with fewer college graduates choosing teaching as a profession and, once chosen, fewer are remaining with the profession for a lifetime. Less than 5 percent of the nation's graduating high school seniors indicate a preference for teaching as a career. While some outstanding students are still entering the teaching profession, national data indicates that the majority of those who choose education as a major field within college have lower ACT and SAT scores than the national average of students who intend to pursue other careers.

1. TEACHER PREPARATION AND CERTIFICATION

To assure quality teachers in the future, the Commission recommends:

a. The strengthening of standards for entrance to the Colleges of Education in the University of Nevada System.

b. The implementation of competency and literacy tests for future teachers. The State Board of Education and the University Board of Regents should coordinate procedures and requirements to implement single tests with standard cut-off scores to ensure that future teachers are both literate and competent in their teaching fields. A teacher entering the State of Nevada should also be required to successfully complete the same examination within one year of entry into Nevada teaching.

Teacher competency assessments that are developed must be relevant to the subject matter; i.e., elementary education teachers' assessments should be relevant to their specific skills and general teaching subjects while secondary school teachers should be tested both in teaching skills and their specific assignments such as mathematics or social studies.

c. A requirement for one initial teaching year with support from a team consisting of a master teacher, a school administrator and a university faculty member for all newly employed teachers should be implemented. This initial teaching year would constitute the teacher's probationary year.

d. Standardized teacher evaluation guidelines and procedures as well as a procedures review process should be established so that teachers and administrators are properly and consistently evaluated throughout their professional career.

e. The Department of Education should establish an alternative certification program for individuals who have expertise in areas where teacher shortages exist, such as computer science, mathematics, science, or bilingual education. While these individuals have the necessary expertise in subject matter knowledge, the Commission recognizes that they may not have the teaching skills necessary for successful classroom teaching. Therefore, the Commission recommends that such provisionally certified personnel work under the close guidance of a master teacher and that they be required to become fully certified within two years from the issuance of their provisional certificate.

f. Local school districts and the State's two university level Colleges of Education should aggressively and actively recruit Hispanic, Black and American Indian teachers and students so that Nevada's teachers and administrators reflect the State's diversified ethnic makeup. Since these teachers and administrators serve as role models for Nevada's Hispanic, Black and American Indian students, the Commission strongly urges the adoption and implementation of affirmative action programs to attract minorities to the education profession.

g. The Commission recommends that the State and local school districts develop magnets to encourage able students to choose teaching as a career. Such programs as scholarships for future teachers should be implemented.

2. TEACHER RECERTIFICATION

Recertification, as currently provided under Nevada statutes, requires that the current classroom teacher return to school for updating of various classes and skills. The Commission recommends that these recertification classes have a direct effect on or specific relationship to the teacher's assignment, the area of his or her specific expertise, or to the fundamentals of teaching. The Commission also recognizes that these recertification requirements

should be flexible enough to allow a teacher to retrain in areas in which there may be a skill shortage—such as computer science or mathematics—or an individual preference to teach.

3. ASSIGNMENT OF TEACHERS WITHIN THE CLASSROOM SETTING

The Commission heard testimony concerning the assignment of teachers in areas other than their area of certification. A number of members of the Commission expressed concern that the data that was reported to the State Department of Education by local districts did not adequately reflect the assignment of teachers to areas other than those for which they were certified. The Commission, therefore, recommends that an administrator's credential be either suspended or revoked for failure to accurately report the number of teachers teaching outside their areas of certification. The Commission strongly urges local school districts to assign teachers in their area of certification and to severely limit the number of instances when teachers are assigned to instruct subject matters which are outside their area of certification or skills.

The Commission recommends that the State Board of Education develop a means whereby a teacher may demonstrate his competence in a specific subject matter and thereby become endorsed to teach that subject.

4. TEACHER COMPENSATION

National data indicates that Nevada's position among the states on average salary paid to teachers has eroded in recent years, with further erosion anticipated because of the lack of salary increases during the 1983-84 and 1984-85 school years. Recognizing the importance of meaningful and competitive teacher salaries, the Commission recommends that, during the next five years, the State and local school district commit the necessary resources for Nevada's average teacher salaries to be in the upper 20 percent, or top 10 states, in the United States.

School/ Community Partnerships

Nevada school districts should establish partnerships and cooperative relationships with Nevada's businesses, institutions of higher education and public agencies in order to use educational and private resources more effectively. Today, businesses spend substantial sums of money each year to teach employees basic skills such as reading, writing and mathematics and to train employees who already possess these skills in specialized areas needed for their workforce. Effective partnerships between the educational community and the business sector can provide valuable services to private enterprise as well as valuable resources and support to local school districts.

The Commission also recommends that local school districts avail themselves of all local and community resources such as libraries, artists, business people, junior achievement, and use these resources wherever available. There are valuable resources within the local community and they can be, if properly utilized, a direct enhancement to education. These types of partnerships both provide valuable services and prevent duplication of effort that may result in increased costs to Nevada's taxpayers.

Parental Involvement

The public schools belong to the people of Nevada. Research suggests that effective schools have extensive involvement of parents in the school. The Commission, therefore, calls upon all parents to involve themselves in the education of not only their children but all youth.

Educating Nevada's Special Populations

The Commission recognizes the State's responsibility in providing financial support for the educational needs of its handicapped students. The Commission recommends continued expansion of funding for special education throughout the State and encourages the State Department of Education and local school districts to continue to provide special emphasis on educating the learning disabled, the physically handicapped, and the academically talented. The Commission further recommends that local school districts provide programs that meet the needs of Nevada's non-English speaking students and that these programs be provided in such a manner that they preserve the student's appreciation of his ethnic and cultural background.

SUMMARY

These recommendations, as prescribed steps for action, are reasonable and attainable. Their implementation will continue the momentum within Nevada's school system towards excellence. However, no single solution will necessarily work well for every district or school due to the diversity of Nevada's communities and populations. The State, the State Department of Education, and local school boards all have an important role in ensuring a higher quality education for Nevada's children. The dialogue which has been created should continue. Within this dialogue are the elements of excellence for Nevada's system of public schools.

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Production and Printing: *Department of General Services, Division of Printing*